

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

105th Congress
2nd Session

Vote No. 93

April 22, 1998, 4:33 pm
Page S-3419 Temp. Record

EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS/Class Size

SUBJECT: Education Savings Act for Public and Private Schools . . . H.R. 2646. Murray amendment No. 2295.

ACTION: AMENDMENT REJECTED, 49-50

SYNOPSIS: As amended, H.R. 2646, the Parent and Student Savings Account PLUS Act, will enact the compromise provisions of S. 1133, as reported, on education savings accounts and other education initiatives. It will expand the recently enacted education savings account tax credit, will provide an exclusion from gross income for distributions from qualified State tuition programs, will extend and expand the current-law section 127 tax exclusion (for employer-provided education assistance), and will assist local governments in issuing bonds for school construction by increasing the small-issuer bond exemption. The bill will also enact a proposal to give school construction aid to high growth districts. In total, approximately \$6 billion in tax relief for education over the next 10 years will be provided. That cost will be more than fully offset by modifying the employer deduction for vacation pay and by changing the treatment of the foreign tax credit carryback and carryforward periods (for increased revenues of \$6.9 billion over 10 years). The education tax credit will be expanded by increasing the annual contribution limit for education IRAs from \$500 to \$2,000 for taxable years 1999 through 2002 and by changing the definition of qualified education expenses to include kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) expenses (the credit currently applies only to higher education expenses).

The Murray amendment would express the sense of Congress that, "Congress should support efforts to hire 100,000 new teachers to reduce class sizes in first, second, and third grades to an average of 18 students per class all across America." The amendment would also make several findings, including that studies have shown that reducing the number of students per classroom increases student performance, and that one New York City study found that more than 90 percent of the variation in achievement in mathematics and reading was due to differences in teacher qualifications.

Those favoring the amendment contended:

Class sizes are too big. We have seen lots of studies that have shown when class sizes have been reduced student performance

(See other side)

| YEAS (49) | | | NAYS (50) | | NOT VOTING (1) |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| Republicans (4 or 7%) | Democrats (45 or 100%) | | Republicans (50 or 93%) | Democrats (0 or 0%) | Republicans (1) Democrats (0) |
| Campbell | Akaka | Johnson | Abraham | Hutchinson | Helms- ² |
| D'Amato | Baucus | Kennedy | Allard | Hutchison | |
| Jeffords | Biden | Kerrey | Ashcroft | Inhofe | |
| Specter | Bingaman | Kerry | Bennett | Kempthorne | |
| | Boxer | Kohl | Bond | Kyl | |
| | Breaux | Landrieu | Brownback | Lott | |
| | Bryan | Lautenberg | Burns | Lugar | |
| | Bumpers | Leahy | Chafee | Mack | |
| | Byrd | Levin | Coats | McCain | |
| | Cleland | Lieberman | Cochran | McConnell | |
| | Conrad | Mikulski | Collins | Murkowski | |
| | Daschle | Moseley-Braun | Coverdell | Nickles | |
| | Dodd | Moynihan | Craig | Roberts | |
| | Dorgan | Murray | DeWine | Roth | |
| | Durbin | Reed | Domenici | Santorum | |
| | Feingold | Reid | Enzi | Sessions | |
| | Feinstein | Robb | Faircloth | Shelby | |
| | Ford | Rockefeller | Frist | Smith, Bob | |
| | Glenn | Sarbanes | Gorton | Smith, Gordon | |
| | Graham | Torricelli | Gramm | Snowe | |
| | Harkin | Wellstone | Grams | Stevens | |
| | Hollings | Wyden | Grassley | Thomas | |
| | Inouye | | Gregg | Thompson | |
| | | | Hagel | Thurmond | |
| | | | Hatch | Warner | |

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

has improved. Everyone knows from testing that America's students are getting steadily worse, and that students in both developed and developing countries consistently obtain better test scores. Every parent also understands the value of having fewer kids in a classroom. One of the first questions a parent will ask his or her child after the first day of school is how many other kids there are in the class. Our colleagues can worry about whether involving the Federal Government will upset the Federal-State relationship on education, or whether there are other uses that the States might want to spend the money on. We do not have such worries, nor do we believe do the American people. The Murray amendment would express the sense of the Senate in favor of reducing the student-teacher ratio, which should raise our kids' test scores up to world class standards. Those teachers who are hired should be qualified teachers who receive ongoing training. We urge the adoption of this amendment.

Those opposing the amendment contended:

Some States and localities would like to hire teachers to reduce the average number of students in their classrooms. Others have much greater priorities. The Murray amendment, though, implicitly assumes that there is some sort of pressing need for a new Federal program to hire 100,000 new teachers nationwide. Of course, it does not do anything; it just says it is the sense of Congress that the Federal Government should help hire those teachers. Interestingly, the sponsor of this amendment and many other liberal Democratic Senators who say that States have such an urgent, pressing need for funds to hire more teachers just voted against the Gorton amendment, which would have given States the option of taking education funding in a block grant that would have allowed them to hire those teachers. Given the chance, they have already voted against a proposal that would have given the States more than enough money to pay for all current educational programs and still have plenty left over to hire well more than 100,000 new teachers. They voted against that proposal, though, because it would have taken away their ability to tell the States how to spend the money. They had a choice between hiring teachers or keeping Federal control for themselves, and they voted for themselves.

In a few States and a few school districts, especially some high-growth districts, there is unquestionably a strong desire to reduce overall class sizes. However, the fact is that those States and districts are in a distinct minority. Most States have been steadily reducing the average size of their classes, and that trend is expected to continue. In 1955 the average public school class size in the United States was 27 students, in 1975 it had dropped to 21, and today it is down to 17.3. When only elementary schools are considered, the numbers are slightly higher, but they still show a steady decline--from 30.2 in 1955 to just 18.5 today. Of course, over exactly that same time span of steadily declining classroom sizes the performance of students has steadily declined as well. Further, when one looks at particular school districts, such as the District of Columbia school district, one finds that some of the worst students are found in classes that have very low numbers of students per class. In the District, which regularly scores more poorly than all of the States on academic tests, the average class size is just 15 students. We know that the District has well documented needs, including that it needs school repairs, more textbooks, and most of all a little competent administration, but it has done very well in lowering its average classroom size. The one-size-fits all solution of the Murray amendment makes absolutely no sense for the District or for most of the States and school districts across the country. Frankly, it is almost bizarre to say that reducing the average classroom size in elementary schools from the current 18.5 students to 18 students is the panacea that is going to save our failing public schools. We know that this amendment is a nonbinding, feel-good amendment that will sound good to the voters because they have not been given all the facts, but it really expresses support for a very bad idea. We therefore urge our colleagues to join us in voting against it.